

Dream Act Is a Nightmare For California

By Assemblyman Cameron Smyth

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On Friday, the Assembly voted to allow undocumented college students to receive state-administered financial aid, including the highly competitive Cal Grants. I joined all of my Republican colleagues in opposing AB 131, the so-called "California Dream Act". Apparently it wasn't enough that we already allow undocumented students to receive in-state tuition; now we have to expand eligibility for the scarce financial aid resources that don't even cover the demand from citizens and lawful immigrants.

Supporters of the bill argue that this bill increases access to higher education and enables these students to become more skilled and better prepared for the workforce, so that they can contribute back to their communities. While I have no doubt that this will increase access and further strain our higher education system, the rest of the argument is based on a flawed premise. People who are in the United States illegally cannot be legally employed. Essentially, the supporters are suggesting that these undocumented students will be better prepared for jobs that they are not legally allowed to hold.

Perhaps I've become cynical in my five years in Sacramento, but I'd guess that their next move is to allow undocumented immigrants who graduate from a California university or community college to hold a job without regard for their immigration status. After all, what good is their taxpayer-subsidized college education if they aren't legally allowed to join the workforce?

As it stands, there are limited state resources available for Cal Grants and other state-administered financial aid. There are already over 100,000 students who are here legally who apply for these programs. At the same time, the UC, CSU, and Community College systems estimate that they serve over 40,000 undocumented students who will now qualify for financial aid from the State. Even if we assume that the availability of financial aid doesn't attract more undocumented students to the system, we're talking about increasing demand for financial aid by 40% while the pot of money stays the same size. Therefore, for every dollar awarded to an undocumented student from that pot of money, a dollar would have to be taken away from a citizen or a legal immigrant. I believe that is wrong.

With California facing difficult economic times, and with state resources strained to the max, now is not the time to implement a program that is estimated to cost an additional \$20 million in General Fund dollars. Even if he doesn't agree with my views on immigration policy, I hope Governor Brown can see that AB 131 just doesn't make financial sense for California. Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed this same legislation four times; Governor Brown should do the same.